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MINNESOTA WORKFORCE CENTER - ANOKA COUNTY BLAINE, MINNESOTA

One-Stop Profile

November 1996

Based on a Site Visit Conducted During September 1996

**MINNESOTA WORKFORCE CENTER - ANOKA
COUNTY
BLAINE, MINNESOTA
One-Stop Profile**

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MINNESOTA WORKFORCE CENTER - ANOKA COUNTY BLAINE, MINNESOTA One-Stop Profile

DESCRIPTION OF THE LOCAL CONTEXT

The Minnesota Workforce Center of Anoka County is located in the city of Blaine, a Twin Cities suburb about 25 miles north of downtown Minneapolis. Anoka is Minnesota's fourth largest county, with a population of approximately 275,000. Although the county's residents are predominantly European-American (97%), non-European immigrant populations are increasing partly due to the existence of a refugee resettlement program in the county. The county has a relatively low rate of poverty. In 1990, an estimated 4% of all Anoka County families lived below the poverty level, but nearly one-quarter (23%) of female-headed households lived below the poverty level. 87% of county residents have a high school diploma or GED, and average annual household income in 1990 was approximately \$40,000.

In recent years, new job creation in the county has outpaced population growth. Sectors such as instruments, medical products, and business services accounted for the largest percentage of new jobs created during the first half of the 1990s. Throughout the 1990s, although Anoka County has generally had the highest unemployment rates of the counties within the metropolitan area, rates have been lower than the state average. From 1990 to 1993, unemployment in the county has averaged slightly under 5%; since 1994, the rate has declined. The present level of unemployment is estimated at 3%.

One-Stop implementation in Anoka County has been built on a strong foundation of collaboration among workforce and social service providers at both at the state and local level. As described in the state profile for Minnesota, consolidation of workforce development programs under Minnesota's Department of Economic Security (MDES) began in 1977 with the merging of the Department of Employment Services, Vocational Rehabilitation, the Governor's Manpower office, and the Economic Opportunity Office. In 1985, State Services for the Blind was combined with existing

MDES programs.¹ Since 1986, one of the state's goals has been to encourage physical co-location of Job Service and Unemployment Insurance² services with as many local service providers as possible.

In Anoka County, the first steps toward a consolidated workforce center came in 1988, when the Anoka County Board of Commissioners and the Anoka County Private Industry Council (PIC) integrated welfare employment and training programs with JTPA and other employment and training initiatives within the Anoka County service delivery area (SDA). In 1991, a large group of workforce development and human service agencies relocated to a new shared physical facility—the Anoka County Human Service Center.

In 1995, after four years of co-location and increasingly collaborative planning, the county's JTPA administrative entity called the Anoka County Job Training Center (ACJTC), the Blaine office of MDES's Job Service/Unemployment Insurance (ES/UI), and the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) joined together to form the "Minnesota Workforce Center – Anoka County." In June, 1996, the Anoka County Income Maintenance Department and Child Care Assistance became co-located partners within the Workforce Center. State Services for the Blind (SSB) is also considered an official partner although it does not have staff housed at the Center.³

As described in more detail later in this profile, the core partners in the Anoka County Workforce Center—the agencies responsible for JTPA, ES/UI, Vocational Rehabilitation, Income Maintenance, and Child Care Assistance—have developed an integrated Center under the One-Stop initiative that takes advantage of the specialized functions of each agency partner. A cross-agency consolidated planning and oversight process is used to shape these differentiated functions into a coordinated workforce development service delivery system. In addition, the core public agency partners in

¹ Although MDES was renamed the Department of Jobs and Training in 1985, its earlier name, the Minnesota Department of Economic Security, was restored in 1994. The Department of Jobs and Training and the Department of Economic Security are both referred to as "MDES" in this profile.

² Unemployment Insurance has been called Reemployment Insurance in Minnesota since 1994. We use the more generic Unemployment Insurance (UI) designation throughout this profile, as well as the generic designation ES (for Employment Service) to refer to the Minnesota Job Service.

³State Services for the Blind staff are available on an "on-call" or referral basis to serve Center customers.

the Anoka County Workforce Center are co-located with twenty other human services and education providers in a clean and modern building known as the Anoka County Human Service Center, construction of which was completed in 1991. One observer has termed this a “Center around the Center,”⁴ — a Workforce Center housed within a larger social service complex in which a range of services are available, including educational, counseling, income maintenance, and various support services.

The local vision of One-Stop is to provide employment and training programs within “a seamless system that supports community-based coordination with other service programs.” The goals of the system are to

- emphasize quality outcomes and customer satisfaction from job seekers and employers;
- provide the means for customers to make informed career, training, and hiring choices through effective assessment and labor market information;
- support customer service through an information system that promotes sharing of information and maximization of resources;
- replicate and expand on already-existing innovative efforts to provide comprehensive, high quality employment and training services;
- increase the global competitiveness of the workforce.

Several key factors have influenced the context within which the local One-Stop vision has emerged. These include (1) a history of innovative approaches toward inter-agency team-building; (2) local political and financial support for the creation of a coordinated system for workforce development; (3) a high degree of cooperation and coordination among the core partners of the Workforce Center and between these partners and the other agencies co-located at the Human Service Center; (4) a proactive and coordinated public support system in the context of welfare-to-work and school-to-work initiatives; (4) present low unemployment rates and a consequent tight labor market; (5) a decline in overall funding at the Center; and (6) a site that is well equipped for establishing a One-Stop. Each of these factors is briefly described below.

- *Since the mid-1980s, a variety of Anoka County agencies have collaborated in the forming of “fusion teams.”* These teams began to

⁴ Sheryl L. Head, 1994. “Factors in the Creation of Skills Centers: Five Case Studies,” Training and Employment Program, Center for Policy Research, National Governors Association.

form around specific innovative programs such as the Minnesota Parents Fair Share (MNPFS), a program for non-custodial parents of AFDC recipients, which originated in Anoka County. These teams included representatives from such agencies as the Job Training Center, the Minnesota Department of Human Service, and the County Attorney's Office.

- *There is strong local political and institutional support for the creation of a coordinated system for workforce development.* The Anoka Center is a product of ongoing cooperation among city and county governments and departments, non-profit agencies, and private foundations that has led to securing a One-Stop site and achieving continued funding for innovative programs.
- *There is a history of inter-agency cooperation both among Workforce Center "core" partners and with the other agencies that are co-located at the Human Service Center.* Workforce Center partners have had some degree of coordination of services since their co-location in the Human Service Center, and a close collaboration had been formed with the County's Income Maintenance and Child Care Assistance staff prior to their co-location at the Workforce Center in 1996. Well-developed communication mechanisms are also in place to enable workforce efforts to be coordinated with a wide range of agencies and organizations, many of which are also co-located within the larger context of the Human Service Center.
- *The Center is proactively involved in welfare-to-work and school-to-work efforts.* With the recent addition of the County's Income Maintenance and Child Care Assistance staff as core partners of the Workforce Center, and the receipt of a school-to-work implementation grant in partnership with educational institutions, the Center is laying the foundation for increased activity in areas related to transitions to employment.
- *At present, the rate of unemployment in the county is low.* The unemployment rate in the county is currently at about 3%. Although this has made it easier for job seekers to find work, employers are having difficulty finding well-trained personnel. To assist employers, a system of employer "account representatives" has been established at the Center.
- *The Center is faced with the challenge of serving larger numbers of customers with a decreasing budget.* Overall funding levels for all Center programs decreased by 6% in 1996. At the same time the Center is maintaining its commitment to serving a "universal population," including customers from outside the county. This situation has placed stress on staff and management to "do more with less."

- *The building that houses the Center is generally well suited for a One-Stop.* The Human Service Center is a well-maintained building located in a park-like setting on ten acres, and rental costs for social service agencies and programs are below commercial rates in the area. The Center is easily accessible for most north Twin Cities area residents by car and has a large parking area. Public transportation is also available to the Center.

ORGANIZATION AND GOVERNANCE OF THE LOCAL ONE-STOP INITIATIVE

Policy Oversight. Anoka County is a single-county service delivery area (SDA) under the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA). As is the case for all of Minnesota's 17 existing SDAs, it has been redesignated as a "Workforce Service Area." A seven-member County Board of Commissioners acts as the grant recipient for all Title II and Title III JTPA funds. In 1995, the existing Private Industry Council's (PIC) membership was expanded to create a local "Workforce Council" that coordinates with the County Board of Commissioners in determining local service delivery decisions. The County's Workforce Council is comprised of a majority of private-sector representatives and is chaired by a private-sector representative. The State's Job Service, the State's Rehabilitation Services, the County's Income Maintenance Department, and local technical and community colleges are also represented on the Workforce Council.

In Minnesota, Workforce Councils have responsibility for (1) selecting local priorities for service and target populations; (2) assuring non-duplication of workforce services; (3) jointly planning for collaboration, on-site review, and oversight of program performance; and (4) determining the most effective designation of administrative entities, grant recipients, and program operators for the Workforce Center. Although local Workforce Councils have substantial discretion in selecting local service providers, the state requires that MDES continue to be the grant recipient and administrative entity for Wagner-Peyser, VETS, and UI funds.

Day-to-day governance of the Workforce Center is provided by a Steering Committee that directs, coordinates, and oversees Center operations. The Steering Committee is co-chaired by the directors of four agencies within the Center (JTPA, ES/UI, Rehabilitation Services, and Income Maintenance). Meetings of the Steering Committee, which are held every three weeks, are attended by about twenty supervisory staff and directors from all agency partners at the Center including

representatives from Child Care Assistance and the State Services for the Blind. The Steering Committee makes recommendations to the Workforce Council on issues of service improvement, provides input to the preparation of Workforce Center budgets and service coordination plans, oversees customer satisfaction and outcome measurement, and maintains ongoing communication with front-line staff on a variety of policy, funding, and operational issues.

Participating Agencies. As of June 1996, there were six major public agency partners of the Workforce Center, five of which are co-located within the Human Service Center. These are as follows:

- *Anoka County Job Training Center (ACJTC).* The Job Training Center is a county department and is responsible for JTPA and Title V Older Workers Programs. Through cooperative agreements with the Income Maintenance Department, the Job Training Center is also responsible for providing employment and training services to participants in Food Stamp Employment and Training (FSET), STRIDE (JOBS) and the Minnesota Family Investment (MFIP) programs. It also receives funds to operate the local Minnesota Parents' Fair Share program, a non-custodial parent support program.
- *Job Service/Unemployment Insurance* provides Wagner-Peyser, Unemployment Insurance, and Veterans Employment and Training Services (VETS).
- *Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS).* DRS, a division of the Minnesota Department of Economic Security, has also been co-located at the Human Service Center since its opening in 1991. Although it has been part of coordinated Center management since 1991, DRS operated independently of ES/UI and the Job Training Center prior to its inclusion as a formal Workforce Center partner in 1995, largely because of its focus on the disabled, who were perceived as having special needs.
- *Anoka County Income Maintenance.* In 1996, the County's Income Maintenance Department joined the other three core partners, whose directors have co-managed the Workforce Center since the opening of the Human Service Center in 1991. Income Maintenance staff currently co-located at the Center include all intake workers and several financial specialists. Plans are currently underway to co-locate all remaining Income Maintenance staff at the Center as soon as physical renovations are completed.
- *Anoka County's Community Social Services and Mental Health - Child Care Assistance (CCA).* All CCA staff joined the other core partners at

the same time as the Income Maintenance staff. CCA offers financial assistance in paying child-care costs for families receiving public assistance and other low-income families.

- *State Services for the Blind* (SSB). SSB is a mandated One-Stop partner under the Minnesota Workforce System One-Stop certification process. Although not a co-located partner because most of the services for the blind are concentrated in the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area, SSB staff are available to meet with Workforce Center customers on an “on-call” or referral basis.

In addition to the Workforce Center partners listed above, several other agencies that offer workforce-related services are co-located at the Human Service Center. These include the following:

- *Achieve*, which operates under the County Human Service Division, offers a “sheltered work” environment for persons with developmental disabilities;
- *Metro North Learning Lab*, a joint project of six independent school districts, provides adult basic education (ABE), General Equivalency Diploma (GED) preparation, and English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction.
- *Educational Opportunity Center* (EOC) provides counselors who staff the Career Resource library in the Workforce Center on a part-time basis. The goal of the EOC is to assist adults from diverse backgrounds in entering or returning to schools and colleges. Using a variety of assessment, career exploration, and career workshops, EOC staff provide guidance, personal assistance, and referrals on a variety of academic, financial aid, and career development concerns.

Non co-located organizations that have workforce development as an important part of their mission, and with whom the Workforce Center partners maintain close links include the following:

- *Rise, Inc.* provides training and placement services in private industry for people with disabilities.
- Educational and training providers such as *Anoka-Ramsey Community College* and *Anoka-Hennepin Technical College* offer services to Center customers enrolled in funded education/training programs.

A number of additional agencies and organizations located at the Human Service Center offer a wide variety of advocacy, counseling, and referral, services targeted to disadvantaged and disabled populations. These include the following:

- *Anoka County Community Action Program* is a private non-profit social service agency serving disadvantaged and low-income populations through a variety of programs including Head Start, Weatherization, Housing Rehabilitation, and Energy Assistance.
- *Anoka County Community Health and Environmental Services* provides medical and nutritional services for families and children through on-site immunization programs, a Well Child Clinic, and the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program.
- *Association for Retarded Citizens (ARC) of Anoka County* provides advocacy and support services to people with developmental disabilities.
- *Catholic Charities* provides a wide range of charitable services to children, families, the elderly, homeless, and refugees.
- *Child Care Resource and Referral* offers information and referrals to child care providers.
- *Community Emergency Assistance Program* offers emergency assistance including an on-site “food shelf” and provides services to help families become self-sufficient.
- *Consumer Advocates for the Handicapped* provides advocacy for persons with disabilities.
- *Family Resource Center* operates through a consortium of eight school districts and offers family education services for children and adults as well as on-site day care for infants and children receiving services at the Human Service Center. For program participants, day care is paid for through specific Human Service Center agencies and is available to others on a sliding scale basis.
- *Judicare* offers free legal advice and representation in civil cases for low-income County residents.
- *Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota* provides counseling services and assistance in finding affordable housing.
- *United Way’s First Call for Help* offers 24 hour information and referral services.
- *Wilder Child Guidance Center and Domestic Abuse Program* offers counseling services for children and families and group therapy for domestic abuse.

An important aspect of the Workforce Center is its holistic approach to the integration of welfare-to-work and school-to-work initiatives into the design of service delivery. Two events have promoted these efforts: the move to incorporate the County’s Income Maintenance Staff into the Workforce Center and the receipt of a

school-to-work implementation grant by the Workforce Center and several education partners.

Linkages with welfare-to-work programs. The Anoka Workforce Center is currently beginning what one respondent described as “the next level of integration” of the welfare system with the workforce development system. In June 1996, 26 Income Maintenance Department intake staff and 9 Child Care Assistance staff joined as partners of the Workforce Center. As soon as a new fourth floor of the Human Service Center is completed in 1997, the remainder of the approximately 100 Income Maintenance staff — those working with ongoing cases — will also be housed within the Workforce Center.

The timing of the integration of Income Maintenance and Child Care Assistance staff into the Workforce Center is viewed as particularly appropriate, because new state welfare reform measures stipulate that as of July 1997, all AFDC recipients with children aged 3 or over will be required to begin looking for work within ten days after finishing a 30-day group orientation. Income Maintenance and Child Care Assistance staff view their adjustment to the Workforce Center as a “major culture shift,” but were nearly all positive about the expected benefits to customers. Because the new emphasis will be on helping customers find work rather than administering benefits payments, staff felt that by joining as full partners of the Workforce Center, they were strategically placing themselves to prepare for major changes in the content and focus of their work.

Income maintenance staff have had brief orientations to the programs available through Workforce Center partners, and are optimistic that further integration of staff functions will occur over time. They also see obvious benefits to their customers with the co-location and coordination of services with their workforce development partners. One example of these benefits is that customers making the transition from welfare to work will spend less time in scheduling appointments at different sites. Also, because of the orientation of the Center to preparing customers for work, as well as the availability of affordable and convenient child care through the Family Resource Center, income maintenance staff believe their customers will be better able to concentrate on the job search. According to an Income Maintenance staff person, “We wouldn’t have been able to do what we are doing if the Workforce Center concept was not in place. You need this kind of stable structure to implement welfare-to-work.” “The message is very different now,” said one key Job Training Center staff person.

“It’s about *work first* from the first day of screening and all throughout orientations, workshop and job search process.”

School-to-Work. Workforce Center staff collaborated on the writing of a school-to-work grant with five local independent school districts, business leaders, and the local community college and technical college. They received a \$650,000, five-year school-to-work implementation grant and, at the time of the evaluation visit, were in the process of interviewing for a full-time coordinator of school-to-work efforts.

The Workforce Center is to act as the “hub” for Anoka County’s school-to-work implementation, serving to bring parties involved in school-to-work together. The Center will also coordinate collection and dissemination of labor market information, which seen as very much lacking in the schools, and has plans to link schools electronically to MDES and other computer databases and programs. Much of the effort will involve educating the community about the purposes of school-to-work. In the words of one key respondent:

One-Stops have given school districts and community agencies one place to turn for employment services. A lot of teams of from the high schools have come out to see who we are, but some people still don’t realize what we can do, working together as completely as we do. We see school-to-work as a crucial part of our service to the community. Our part is in the coordination of services to youth — not just those going on to college. There is a need to educate people that school-to-work is not narrowly vocational, but is concerned with a broad approach to the workplace. It’s also not an apprenticeship in which people will be channeled into one area. It’s career education, discovery, looking for the *right* career interest.

COMMUNICATION AND COORDINATION

Because the Anoka model of integrated service delivery stresses not only co-location but coordination of service delivery among a wide range of partners, providing formal mechanisms for communication among partners is seen as crucial. In addition to the Workforce Center “Steering Committee”, whose role has been discussed above, there are several forums for communication at the Anoka Center. These include a Workforce Center “Coordination and Planning Group,” which meets to discuss issues of Center policy and coordination; “Operations Committees” that address specific aspects of Center operation and provide feedback to the Steering Committee, and a broader “Human Service Advisory Group,” which includes representatives from many of the agencies co-located in the Human Service Center complex.

The *Workforce Center Coordination and Planning Group* meets on a quarterly basis. The group, which is co-chaired by the directors of Job Training Center, Job Service, the Division of Rehabilitation Services, and Income Maintenance Services, provides a forum for planning, implementing, and managing a coordinated system of employment and training. The Coordination and Planning Group meetings are described as relatively informal, and they provide an opportunity for partners to discuss a range of policy matters. In addition to the five core Workforce Center partners (Job Training Center, Job Service, and Division of Rehabilitation Services, Anoka County Income Maintenance, and State Services for the Blind), other partners in the Coordination and Planning Group include Anoka-Ramsey Community College, Anoka-Hennepin Technical College, Rise Incorporated, Metro North Learning Lab, the Family Resource Center, and the Anoka County Community Action Program. This shared leadership structure of the Workforce Center has increased the ability of local service providers to combine program strategies and offer innovative service programs.

Cross-agency “operations committees,” comprised of front-line and supervisorial staff from the participating Center partners, provide the opportunity for agency staff to discuss and provide input and feedback to the Steering Committee on common service functions (intake, assessment and career planning, job search, training, case management, and employer services, services for the general public) as well as Center-wide operations and management issues (staff training, budgeting and accounting). Another committee, the “customer advisory group,” solicits input from focus groups of staff and customers and makes reports on customer feedback to the Steering Committee.

The *Human Service Advisory Group* composed of all Workforce Center partners and other agencies that are co-located at the Human Service Center, has held regular monthly meetings since the Center began operations in 1991. These meetings provide a forum for Workforce Center partners to coordinate workforce development efforts with the range of social and educational service providers represented at the Human Service Center.

Although there are many opportunities for direct service staff at the Center to participate on these various interagency advisory and operations committees, the different agencies that comprise the Workforce Center still have their own data systems and telephone lines. State and County employees, for example, are on different telephone networks. To facilitate day-to-day communication across staff employed by

different agencies, the Center partners are exploring the feasibility of a common telephone system for all Workforce Center staff.

FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS, BUDGETING, AND FISCAL ISSUES

The Anoka County Workforce Center has received support from a variety of public and private non-profit sources. The building that houses the Human Service Center is located in a park-like setting on ten acres donated by the city of Blaine. The city acquired the land through a tax sale and issued tax-exempt revenue bonds to finance construction of the facility. After the municipal bonds are retired, the building will be owned by Anoka County. United Way of the Minneapolis area donated \$500,000 over five years for program operation, and the McKnight Foundation gave funds that were used to assist agencies relocate to the new Center. Because the building is publicly owned, rental costs are lower than in comparable commercial sites.

Although an integrated Center budget is prepared annually for the purpose of establishing total Center revenues—with the exception of the One-Stop funds which are jointly administered by the Workforce Center partner programs—each agency is responsible for administering its own funds and each has its own rental agreement with the Human Service Center. The Center has been struggling with ways to maintain high levels of service to a universal population. Revenues received by Workforce Center partners have continued to decline in recent years. Center-wide revenues for 1996 were 6% lower than for 1995, declining from approximately \$4.5 million to \$4.2 million. Major cuts were experienced in JTPA funding. From 1995 to 1996, Title II-B Summer Youth Employment Program funding was reduced by 43%, Title IIA by 42%, and Title III by 31%, and federal EDWAA formula funding by 29%. Staffing levels have continued to be reduced over the past two years, at the same time that caseloads have increased.

The Center as a whole received \$57,000 in One-Stop Implementation Grant funding from the state for program year 1995 and an additional \$51,000 in 1996. These funds were used for remodeling (e.g. taking down the walls that separated Job Service from the Job Training Center), for materials and equipment for the Resource Center and Computer Rooms, and for funding a variety of staff positions related to providing universal services. The County contributes additional funds that are used to pay for services available to all Center customers. Although there are no formal cost-sharing agreements across programs at the local level, non-financial agreements among

partners have been signed. Provisions also exist for Workforce Center partners to contract with each other for the delivery of services.

According to Center managers, declining funding levels have taken a toll in terms of reduced employee morale. Another source of financial stress has to do with the Workforce Center's commitment to offer core services to a universal population, including out-of-county residents. Although at the time of the evaluation visit no statistics were available on the proportion of out-of-county residents accessing universal services, there is evidence that this proportion is relatively high. One indicator of the number of non-county residents served comes from a survey of Unemployment Insurance claims taken at the Anoka Center. During the first months of 1996, only 58% were originated by Anoka County residents, with another 32% from the neighboring urban counties of Hennepin and Ramsey, and another 10% from other counties in the Twin Cities region and elsewhere in the state.

MDES officials have consistently stated that there would be no cutbacks because of One-Stop. However, according to one local respondent, "while you really have to give the state credit for that decision, at the same time, in this atmosphere of continuing funding cutbacks, staff are concerned — it's hard for staff sometimes to see the positive side of things when they are looking at losing jobs."

DESIGN OF THE LOCAL ONE-STOP INITIATIVE

Evolution and General Description of Local Design

The creation of the Anoka Human Service Center was the result of dynamic leadership and advocacy within a broader political environment that emphasizes consensus decision-making. With the support of city and county political leaders, community organizations, and philanthropic foundations, strong advocates of a comprehensive Human Service Center—including the director of the Anoka County Community Action Program (CAP) and the director of the Anoka County Job Training Center—were able to realize their vision of a conveniently located Center in which a variety of social, educational, and workforce development services could be located. The construction of the building that houses the various Center agencies provided the basis for a broad partnership among various human service, educational, and workforce development agencies.

The most recent catalyst for a new design for integrated service delivery was the preparation for a local One-Stop Implementation Grant application in the December

1994. As part of the planning process, state and local partners began to conduct an analysis of common functions. Although the local agencies responsible for JTPA, ES/UI, and Vocational Rehabilitation Services had been co-located at the Human Service Center since 1991 and had developed a degree of coordination of services since that time, it was not until late 1994 and early 1995 that these partners began to work together intensively. One respondent characterized this developing relationship within the Workforce Center and among the partners at the Human Service Center as follows:

It's more than a partnership, it is a collaboration. There are many 'cross-wires' of funding, but for me the collaboration is the spirit of oneness that we are all serving the same families. We have gone to partners for letters of support. They all know what we're doing. We have a collaborative in that we care about each other's success.

Relevance of the Local Design to the Four Federal Goals

Universal Access

The partners at the Anoka Workforce Center have developed a service delivery strategy to reach as wide a population as possible and have achieved a high level of visibility to a broad customer base. As described in a later section under core services, a "Career Resource Room" houses a number of automated services available to all interested customers. Additional self-service resources available to all customers include a phone bank, and self-service copy and fax machines.

Partly because of its location in the Human Service Center, the Workforce Center has become known as *the* place in the county to come to prepare for work. Center services are well publicized, and information on Center workshops, programs, and other core services are explained to customers during an orientation. The Center is easily accessible by automobile from most locations in the Twin Cities area, but although it is served by two bus routes, there are still some problems with mass transportation access. People in many areas of the metropolitan region, including some Anoka County areas must still pass through downtown Minneapolis to come to the Center.

The Center provides extended hours of service in order to reach working and under-employed persons looking for opportunities to upgrade skills or change careers, as well as to increase the accessibility of Human Service Center-based classes in ESL, GED, and adult basic education.

Customer Choice

The Anoka County Center is designed to offer county residents a choice of workforce development services in a non-bureaucratic “customer-friendly” atmosphere. The Anoka Center is committed to providing customers a comprehensive menu of services to facilitate customer choice. The Career Resource Room offers services available to the general public. Using these self-service options, individuals can research on-line job listings, call job-line numbers, and access labor market information. They can also practice interviewing skills using interactive computer software, use typing and other office software tutorials, locate information on other community resources, and obtain information about scholarships and career training.

Orientation and information sessions let customers know what other services are available. All customers may register for job search assistance, obtain information about UI benefits, and attend meetings of the Job Club, a networking and support group. Individuals eligible for Unemployment Insurance, categorical programs such as JTPA, welfare-to-work programs, and other services targeted to youth, veterans, older workers, or other groups are informed about their service options.

Integrated Services

Anoka County has a decade-long history of developing innovative interagency collaborative approaches to community problems. The experience of Anoka County with the Minnesota Parents’ Fair Share (MNPFS) in the mid-1980s is one early example of forming “fusion teams” — bringing together diverse county, state, and non-profit agencies to work toward a common goal.⁵ These and other collaborative management approaches have provided a model that has guided the development of Anoka’s Workforce Center.

In response to the state’s vision of developing a seamless system of employment and training, the Anoka Workforce Service Area has developed a local integration plan

⁵ Front-line staff at the Anoka County Job Center saw the limitations of trying to collect child support payments from unemployed non-custodial parents was difficult, and understood that jail sentences for so-called “deadbeat dads” only exacerbated this problem. In 1987, involved staff from several county offices and departments developed a collaborative team to plan the Anoka County Child Support Assistance Program, which provides a range of services to unemployed or underemployed non-custodial parents whose children are receiving public assistance. A more complete discussion of MNPFS, particularly as it relates to the Anoka case, is contained in Sweeney, Kathleen, 1996, “A Shared Leadership Model for Human Service Program Management,” *International Journal of Public Administration*, 19 (7), 1105-20.

that promotes coordination among on-site service providers. As part of the integration plan, a coordination agreement is in effect between the Job Training Center (JTPA) and the Blaine Job Service/Unemployment Insurance Office (ES/UI). Contracts for services are used as needed to clarify and define the agreements between these agencies.

The Anoka County approach to consolidation and integration of One-Stop services tends to maintain a clear “division of labor” among programs, so that individual agencies are still responsible for certain functions. Cross-agency planning and oversight committees ensure that the overall service system is coordinated by providing the opportunity for all partners to have substantial input into the design and participate in the oversight of these various functions. For example, although initial intake and customer orientation are performed by ES/UI staff, an “Initial Services Committee,” formed in January 1995 with staff from the Job Training Center, Job Service and Unemployment Insurance, and the Division of Rehabilitation Services, identifies the range of customer services and formulates procedures for integration of the intake function across all partner programs. Similarly, a multi-agency “Employer Services Committee” provides on-going suggestions for streamlining services to employers through the system of “employer account representatives,” even though the employer services function is staffed by Job Service and coordinated by a “marketer” who is also an MDES employee.

Performance-Driven/Outcome-Based

Developing a system for measuring customer satisfaction with Center services, and for assessing Center-wide outcomes in a way that goes beyond current programmatic reporting requirements, has been the subject of on-going discussions of the customer satisfaction and employer services committees. In addition to local efforts to develop performance measures for the Center, a system of One-Stop performance measures is being developed at the state level.

Since 1995, individual customers have been asked to provide opinions of Center operations and services using feedback forms that are available at reception and through participation in regular “customer advisory” focus groups. Although data on customer satisfaction have been collected, respondents believe that there is not yet an effective system to analyze and disseminate the information to front-line staff. To remedy this situation, an Evaluation Committee, charged with formulating an effective system for evaluating Center-wide performance, was being established at the time of

the evaluation visit. Some initial suggestions made by the Committee include sending surveys by mail to Center customers and having a “mystery shopper” (someone from outside the Center who would pose as a customer) report on Center services and customer-friendliness.

Physical Facilities

The Human Service Center is located on a ten-acre parcel. There is an attractive lawn and parking area in front of the building, and a large pond in the back. The second floor of the building is shared by Job Service, Rehabilitation Services, the Job Training Center, and Metro North, which provides adult basic education, ESL, and GED courses. A portion of the third floor is occupied by additional Job Training Center staff and the staff from Income Maintenance and Child Care Assistance. There are currently five large rooms used by the general public. All of these rooms are located near the main customer entrance of the Workforce Center. They include a Job Search Area, the Career Resource Library, a Personal Computer Lab, a Job Club Room, and a Phone Room. There are also several conference rooms and classroom areas within the Workforce Center. Because of demand for more space in the complex, construction of a fourth story on top of the existing three-story, 100,000-square-foot building was expected to begin in October, 1996 and to be completed by 1997. At this time, the Workforce Center areas will be remodeled to increase the space of the Resource Room and other areas intended for public use.

Anoka County Workforce Center staff and other partners believe that having space available at a relatively low cost at the Human Service Center is one of the most important underpinnings of the success of their project. Respondents were extremely pleased with the work of the building maintenance staff, and said that good building management “made all the difference,” in providing a space that was clean and inviting. “If we had located in an old government-style building,” said one person, “it wouldn’t be the same. This place makes people feel good about coming here.”

IMPLEMENTATION OF LOCAL SUPPORT MECHANISMS

Staffing Arrangements

Since co-location of core Workforce Center partners in 1991, and particularly since the official Workforce Center partnership was formed in 1995, there have been on-going efforts to coordinate and integrate functions. Integration efforts, which are based on the principle of a “partnership of equals,” have been focused on core agency

practices in six major areas: intake, assessment and career planning, job search, training, case management, and employer services. Although not all of these functions are cross-staffed by employees of the different agencies represented at the Workforce Center, activities in each of these areas are coordinated through multi-agency Operations Committees (see “Communication and Coordination” and “Integrated Services” above).

To coordinate the design and delivery of services to welfare recipients, cross-agency teams composed of staff from Income Maintenance, Child Care Assistance, the Job Training Center (which delivers welfare-to-work services), and Job Services have been initiated. Integrated team supervisors meet regularly in a welfare-to-work “steering committee” co-chaired by directors of the Job Training Center, Income Maintenance, and Child Care Assistance to discuss questions of further integrating service delivery. In addition, a welfare-to-work “planning committee” comprised of front-line and supervisory staff also meets to coordinate such activities as integrated job search and employer services.

At the time of the site visit the following staffing arrangements were in effect:

- Reception is jointly staffed by ACJTC and Income Maintenance. Receptionists direct individuals seeking program services to intake staff who are also located in the reception area. Other customers wishing to access “universal” services such as computer-assisted resume preparation, labor market information, and information on education and training providers are directed to the Resource Room or other appropriate areas within the Center.
- ES/UI staff are responsible for intake services for the general public (those not directly referred to other service providers at the Center). Staff make an initial determination of program eligibility and provide an orientation to Center services, going over the “menu” of services offered with each individual. After an initial eligibility determination has been made, customers are registered for Unemployment Insurance, Job Service, Older Worker or Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) programs as appropriate or referred to other programs for which they may be eligible.
- Services available to the general public are generally cross-staffed by several agencies. For example, Job Service and ACJTC staff work in teams to staff the Career Resource Center. They are assisted in this on a part-time basis by counselors from the Education Opportunity Center and by DRS staff who provide information on rehabilitation services and employer requirements for compliance with the Americans with

Disabilities Act (ADA). ACJTC staff also provide a three-day Career Exploration Workshop for the general public. ACJTC and ES/UI staff jointly provide a variety of job search seminars which range from two-hour “mini-seminars” to full-day sessions (see “Services to Individual Customers” below).

- ACJTC staff provide employment and training service for individuals who qualify for all JTPA programs. In addition, through a contractual arrangement with the Income Maintenance Department, they provide employment and training services to participants in welfare-to-work programs such as the Food Stamp E&T program, STRIDE (JOBS), Community Work Experience Program (CWEP), the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP), and the Parent’s Fair Share program.
- DRS staff provide services to customers directly referred to them by outside organizations and to walk-in customers expressing interest in receiving DRS services.

Capacity Building

Although MDES’s Office of Training and Learning Resources offers a regular schedule of classes in St. Paul for front-line, supervisory and management staff, Anoka staff indicated that they did not often have a chance to attend many of these courses. Because of a large demand for training, state training staff have recently begun to offer half- and full-day sessions on-site in Anoka on topics such as labor market information customized for the local area and training for Workforce Center staff. The Anoka Center has also contracted with the local community-technical college to offer “train the trainer” workshops on large-group presentation skills. Capacity-building workshops have also been held at Anoka by private vendors such as Greg Newton.

Although the original three partners of the Workforce Center have been co-located since 1991, respondents indicated that the “real work” of trying to coordinate service delivery began after December, 1994, when the Job Training Center, Job Service, and the Division of Rehabilitation Services saw themselves as “literally thrown together” in formulating a proposal for local One-Stop implementation. Beginning in 1995, local partners conducted a series of workshops intended to provide overviews of programs to staff from other agencies. Although some staff indicated that the amount of information provided at these sessions was “a bit overwhelming,” most felt that since that time they had gained a good understanding of the programs of partner agencies.

More importantly, staff felt that because of the formalization of relations of partner agencies under the Workforce Center, they were able to gain first-hand knowledge of programs by working on various operations committees and by being in daily contact with staff from partner agencies. "Before there was nothing formal," said one Job Training Center staff person. "Now there is much more cooperation among partners that happens as a part of everyday operations." Another respondent put it this way:

There are many different ideas about what cross-training means. Here, we interpret cross-training as informing people about what we do. It doesn't mean that everybody does case management, or that we could do someone else's job. I think 'cross-inform' is a more accurate description of what we do. We perform a lot of duties together, and we have built a process that is a much better relay system. All of us know each other's business.

Perhaps the most important change is that because of the implementation of the Workforce Center concept, we can attach what was before only somebody's name to a person. We all feel free to go next door [to our partners] to ask questions. Before, some people might have considered that 'intruding on their space.' Everyone's made a commitment not to schedule their days too tightly so that they have time for interacting. This has been a great benefit to our customers. If we see that they have a specific need, we can introduce them to someone that can help.

The relatively recent inclusion of the Income Maintenance Department and Child Care Assistance as core Center partners, the passage of welfare reform legislation, and the planned move of 60 additional income maintenance case workers to the Center during 1997 has resulted in the formation and training of cross-agency teams to consolidate planning and delivery of services for what are now five distinct welfare-to-work programs: (1) Food Stamp Employment and Training; (2) Community Work Experience Program for two-parent AFDC families; (3) STRIDE for AFDC recipients; (4) ACCESS, a program that offers child-care subsidies to non-STRIDE participants; and (5) the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP), a program that offers various work incentives to welfare-to-work customers. Teams composed of staff from Income Maintenance, Child Care Assistance, and the Job Training Center have undergone several days of team-building training led by outside consultants. Training has consisted of principles of team formation and structure, laying ground-rules for team meetings, personality assessment, and coping with change.

It is expected that capacity building efforts will be enhanced in mid-1997 with the launching of a “Workforce Excellence Initiative” funded by the McKnight foundation and the U.S. Department of Labor, and developed jointly by MDES and the state’s JTPA Association. The objectives of this initiative include (1) finding effective ways to combine resources in Workforce Centers to create model partnerships among federal, state, local, and private organizations; (2) promoting customer satisfaction and continuous improvement; providing training and technical assistance to all Workforce Centers partners; and (3) introducing best practices through replication of products and resources developed throughout the country.⁶

As a result of a strong emphasis on cross-training and coordination of activities across multiple agency partners, staff identification with individual partner agencies is becoming less strong. For example, at conferences attended by inter-agency teams, it has become common for staff to introduce themselves as working for the Anoka Workforce Center, rather than for the particular agency that employs them. Staff proudly point to the fact that their name-tags refer only identify themselves as staff of the Minnesota Workforce Center – Anoka County, and that it is difficult for customers or visitors to distinguish what person works for which agency.

Management Information Systems (MIS)

The State of Minnesota is part of GEORGE, the multi-state consortium working to develop integrated intake and to create electronic tools to manage clients’ One-Stop activities after they have proceeded through the intake process. This integrated information system would allow One-Stop “case managers” to schedule client flow, take case notes, develop work plans for customers, and plan transition services.

Local Workforce Center partner staff have developed a common three-page application on which preliminary program eligibility determinations are based. They are hopeful that new state-developed MIS will enable them to further streamline local information systems in order to provide more easily accessible client-level data across programs, rather than focusing so heavily on programmatic reporting needs. “A lot is geared toward filling out end reports,” said one respondent. “The system is not really geared to providing us with useful information.”

⁶ Further details on this initiative are included in the Minnesota state profile.

At the same time, the establishment of a Workforce Center has made it easier to share information. Before integration of services, sharing data was more difficult — early problems often revolved around varying interpretations of Minnesota data privacy laws. Recent clarifications at the state level have since, in the words of several local staff, “freed people to be more practical.” Staff see the focus as the *strategic* and *permissible* sharing of information. County files, for example, are now accessible to ES/UI staff on an “as-needed” basis.

One of the major tasks of bridging MIS across programs involves other technical issues such as determining the most effective ways to link communication systems. There is the presumption that Workforce Center partners will eventually share a single file server, a single leased communication line, and shared network resources through the state’s communication network, MNET.

Labor Market Information (LMI) and Related Information Technology Improvements

Local staff at Anoka were particularly pleased with improvements in the accessibility of labor market information since the implementation of One-Stop in Minnesota. Many Anoka staff persons attended a state-sponsored conference on LMI in September and were impressed by the quality of the presentations and the information that was made available to them.

One of the most direct benefits of One-Stop implementation has been the development and continuous expansion of the Resource Center. The Anoka Resource Center contains a well-stocked library that provides job-seekers with information about career areas and the outlooks for employment opportunities in those areas. Another direct benefit has come in the expansion of availability of computers that customers can use to access career and labor market information. As a result of expansion of computer access, customers have easy access not only to job listings and basic data on types of employment, wages, and labor market trends in the local area, but also to the Minnesota Career Information System (CIS), an easy-to-use computer-based encyclopedia on education and training programs available state-wide.

The recent creation by the state of six regional labor market analyst positions was seen by local respondents as a particularly positive development. The regional analyst for their area has been very helpful in providing assistance in conducting an inventory of materials, and in providing new materials for the Resource Center. Local staff stated that they felt very comfortable about contacting their regional analyst at any time

to request LMI. One supervisor described the new improvements in LMI that had resulted since One-Stop implementation:

There have been new materials developed since the Workforce Center concept has become implemented. For instance, the state has just packaged new materials that allow counseling staff to assess the quality and placement rates of any education or training program in the state. Before, we would have had to contact individual schools to get this kind of information. But I think the biggest improvement has been in our comfort levels with using LMI and improved access to information when we need it.

He described a recent case in which he had contacted the regional analyst for information about determining eligibility for a customer in a dislocated worker program:

I had a printer who said that he needed full-time training, that he couldn't get a job without training. I knew that printing was a volatile industry, but I didn't have much specific information on the field. I called the regional analyst, and was able to get information on local area growth rates in that person's field very shortly afterwards. Before, I could have contacted someone at the state, but it would have taken me much more time to get the information I needed. In this case, I was able to make an eligibility determination within days.

Marketing

Another major change that has resulted from One-Stop implementation in Minnesota is the establishment of a "marketer" position at each Workforce Center. In Anoka, the marketer's duties include publicizing the services of the Workforce Center to job seekers and coordinating outreach efforts in the employer community.

The local marketer, in collaboration with operations committee staff, develops a variety of flyers, brochures, and media releases that describe the local Workforce Center services. In addition, local staff coordinate with Human Service Center partners in publishing materials that detail the range of services that are available to Anoka County residents at the Center. For example, a monthly calendar of scheduled workshop and resource area activities is printed and made available to customers.

Because of the state's increased emphasis on services to employers, one of the most important functions of the marketer is coordinating the system of account representatives that was developed by Job Service staff prior to the establishment of the Workforce Center in 1995. The marketer attends employer group meetings, such as those offered by Chambers of Commerce, and puts employers into contact with Job

Service “account representatives.” Because of current tight labor market conditions, many employers contact the marketer with urgent job requests. The marketer disseminates these requests throughout the Center, by circulating flyers to staff and posting them in public areas such as the Resource Center, and by sending e-mail messages to Center staff describing the available position.

Unemployment Insurance tax auditors are also performing new “marketing” duties in the context of the Anoka One-Stop. Because they come into contact with many employers in the course of insurance audits, the state has been promoting an expanded role for them in promoting workforce development services. Auditors are now encouraged to educate employers about the range of workforce services available to them, including funding for training of current and prospective employees, the use of the Center for conducting interviews, and information sessions for new employers on topics such as filing quarterly report forms, applying for an UI registration number, and calculating UI tax rates.

DELIVERY OF ONE-STOP SERVICES TO CUSTOMERS

Services for Individual Customers

The Anoka Workforce Center offers a range of services to customers, including self- and staff-assisted computerized services and individualized services. Core services for individuals available through the Center include:

- Computer-scanning of resumes for job matching;
- Job postings from area employers;
- Job hotlines and information and procedures on civil service recruitment;
- Registration for Job Service;
- Access to personal computers for resumes and cover letters;
- Telephones and answering service to support job search efforts;
- Group job search clubs;
- Career exploration through the Minnesota Career Information System;
- Labor market information; and
- Individual career guidance and assessment.

In addition, a variety of workshops are available at no cost to the general public. These workshops, jointly staffed by ES/UI and ACJTC employees, cover a range of

career exploration and job search topics. Workshops are offered at regularly scheduled times on a weekly basis, and last from two hours to a full day. On topics for which several sessions are offered, participants may attend either or both “modules.”

Specific workshops offered at the Center include the following:

- *Tour of the Facilities.* This workshop on “Next Steps” introduces job seekers to the resources available at the Workforce Center, including computers, reference materials, and the “Job Club.”
- *The Creative Job Search Basic Workshop* offers an overview of the emotional, attitudinal, and financial transition processes involved in employment transitions. This module is recommended as a prerequisite to the others.
- *Applying Skills to the Job Search* assists job seekers in learning to identify and speak about their skills and accomplishments in preparation for the interview process.
- *Written Credentials.* Offered in two modules, these workshops focus on the variety of techniques used in writing resumes, cover letters, and follow-up letters.
- *Applications and References.* Job seekers are taught how to match their experiences and skills with those required by employers on application forms, and how to identify the most suitable persons to list as references.
- *Interviewing.* In the first session on this topic, participants learn about key interview questions and legal rights, and practice interviewing techniques. In the second session, up to ten participants are videotaped in 5-minute mock interview sessions.
- *The Hidden Job Market.* The first of these sessions discusses the variety of methods used to find jobs, including networking, responding to advertisements, and contacting agencies and companies. In a subsequent session, job seekers learn how to use the telephone in the job search—they prepare a script and contact employers during the workshop.

Other services, available to individuals eligible for categorical programs, include services available through all JTPA programs, Title V Older Workers Programs, Food Stamp Employment and Training (FSET), Minnesota Parents’ Fair Share, Community Work Experience Program, Unemployment Insurance, Veterans Employment and Training Services, Rehabilitation Services, State Services For The Blind, and STRIDE programs for welfare recipients.

Services for Employer Customers

Employer services in Anoka County are intended to support local employers in their efforts to “maintain economic stability and provide employment opportunities to job seekers in the community.” In order to accomplish these goals, the state has sought to re-focus efforts on services to employers. At the Anoka Center, this is being accomplished in three ways: (1) through the institution of a system of employer “account representatives,” (2) through increased outreach into employer communities using marketing activities and participation in employer associations, and (3) by adding an “educational” or marketing aspect to the work of the Unemployment Insurance’s Random Audit Unit, as described in the section on “Marketing,” above.

Job Service has designated five staff to act as employer account representatives. Although the function of the representatives is similar to the function carried out by the previous Job Service “interviewers,” the increased emphasis on employer services has changed the proportion of time that is spent courting employers. Job Service interviewers used to spend the majority of their time with individual customers, whereas employer account representatives now spend most of their time on activities targeted to employers. These include more intensive screening of prospective employees for specific job openings, sending letters and visiting employers, attending Chamber of Commerce meetings, holding “Job Fairs,” and increasing the Center’s visibility in the community. Activities are coordinated by the marketer.

Staff respondents identified major advantages to the new emphasis on employer services. According to one Job Service respondent, advantages of the new system include:

- *Preventing duplication of effort in job placement contacts to employers* as a result of improved communication across all employer service staff and use of a shared employer database.
- *Promoting coordination with vocational and technical colleges on providing job assessment services to local employers* using the “Work Keys” system, in which Job Service staff have been trained.
- *Streamlining employer services* by sharing job orders from “desperate employers” across all partner agencies. This has enabled the Center to provide timely referrals to employers seeking new staff.
- *Addressing employers’ need for good labor market information* including providing information to employers considering relocating to the county, as a result of information that can be accessed by Job Service staff over the Internet.

- *An increased ability to visit employers at their worksites* which enables employer service representatives to have a much clearer understanding of employers and their needs and personalizes the service relationship.

CUSTOMER RESPONSE

Individuals

Customers receiving a wide range of services at the Center were invited to a focus group discussion. Several of the respondents had participated in the “Customer Services Advisory Group” described earlier in this profile. The focus group was also attended by two staff members of the Advisory Group, a JS/UI representative, and a Job Training Center vocational counselor. In addition, a job placement specialist from Rise, Inc., was in attendance. Customer respondents included a woman whose son had received assistance from the Division of Rehabilitation Services, several STRIDE program participants, a participant in UI Profiling and Worker Reemployment Services, and several dislocated worker program participants.

Many of the focus group respondents, particularly those with previous experience with Job Service or welfare-to-work services noted that a strong customer service orientation had developed at the Workforce Center. Nearly all respondents believed that Workforce Center staff treated them as individuals. Some commented that they no longer felt that they were being “categorized” by programs they participated in, and many others commented on the dignity and respect that they were accorded at the Center. Below are four brief excerpts from the group discussion.

According to one participant in the STRIDE program for AFDC recipients, there was much less of a stigma attached to receiving help at the Workforce Center:

The thing that has gotten better is the quality of service, the respect that people give you. Before, you really felt the hatred toward you, the disgust that you were receiving public assistance.

Another respondent, who had received Social Security Disability payments for 16 years, had this to say about the evolution of the workforce system in Anoka:

It used to be very hard to get any kind of service through Job Service. If you wanted to access State job leads, they’d funnel you back through Rehabilitation Services. Job Service would treat you as if you were unemployable. It shouldn’t be like that. Everybody should be treated as if they could do something. There has been a big improvement in attitude. There is an attitude of cooperation that didn’t exist before.

One woman whose son had received Rehabilitation Services for over a decade had this to say:

I have seen a big change over the years and through talking to people here. I know that if you come in here looking for work, the staff really care and they'll help you figure out what to do. This Center has definitely made a big difference.

Another respondent had this to say about her perception of "seamless services" and "universality" at the Center:

One thing I like about this place, is that you're treated as an individual. You don't have to have a problem to want to come here. You're not automatically categorized - pegged into one strange little group or another. There are a lot of resources that can be used by the general public, not just for people needing special services.

Employers

As a result of the changes in job seeker and employer services, staff respondents indicated that employers are now much happier about the job applicants referred to them:

"They tell us that the quality of job applicants is improving. By spending time on 'quality initiatives' asking employers different questions about their needs, through better preparation, better transition workshops that help job seekers understand their own skills, we are also doing a much better job in serving employers."

An employer focus scheduled during the site visit was attended by only two individuals, both of whom were members of the local Job Service's Employer Council (JSEC). One was the human resource manager for a large food distribution company. The other was an employee of Rise, Inc., which is an agency that assists individuals with disabilities to obtain private sector employment. The food distribution company, which is headquartered in Houston and has 69 operations branches throughout the country, employs 580 people in neighboring Ramsey County. The human resources director of this company described her experiences working with Center staff:

Our company has found that the Department of Economic Security offers a lot of useful services. We know that they can do on-site training for workers that lose their jobs, help them to write resumes. We have an account representative here now. Before we'd fax openings to about 30 different places. Now we mostly just send them here. They're able to do most of the screening we need. For example, we need a lot of drivers. They're able to verify that drivers have the

right qualifications, a commercial driver's license, enough experience, and so forth, before they send them out to us.

Rise Inc. has worked closely with the Workforce Center in helping develop "job-readiness, job-seeking, and job-keeping skills" among people with disabilities or other serious barriers to employment. The representative had this to say about some of the changes that came about with the creation of the Human Service Center:

The Department has become much more user-friendly. I remember several years ago showing up for my first meeting with staff. I needed to know where to go, but I just got barked at. Now the whole atmosphere is different with the new Workforce Center. People feel comfortable. I appreciate what it means to lose a job. I had to apply for unemployment insurance in 1988. It was such a humiliating experience to ask for money. If I hadn't needed it, I would have waked right out of the door. Things are so different now. You can get help with doing resume searches. There are just a lot more services for employers and for job applicants. It's really nice that so many things are located in one building like child care, a clinic, and WIC programs. People now have one place where they can go instead of running all around.

INFLUENCES ON LOCAL DESIGN AND LESSONS LEARNED

Staff at the Anoka County Workforce Center see themselves as being "ahead of the curve" in anticipating the national move toward One-Stop Centers. They see national and state priorities as "validating" their decision to co-locate and coordinate services. They realize that bringing several agencies together is a difficult task, but one that they have been able to accomplish successfully through the institution of a variety of communication and coordination mechanisms. According to one respondent, the process of "taking stock" of the variety of workforce related programs, and designing a system based on the strengths that each partner brings, has been the most important priority for Center staff and management.

Most staff respondents believed that although the major impetus for the development of the local One-Stop came from the local level, much of what they had recently accomplished was facilitated by the both the federal and state emphasis on integrating services in One-Stops. Several respondents pointed to the "philosophical commitment" of the current MDES Commissioner as making a big difference: "Her approach is a big switch from the way that we used to do things," said one staff member. "It does not mean that integration is easy. We had a lot of fights, a lot of mistrust, particularly at the beginning. But if we ticked somebody off, we made sure

that we put the issue on the table. Once issues were out in the open, they were easier to deal with.”

Staff also believe that integration was easier to accomplish at the local level than it was at the state or national levels. “It’s helpful to understand how systems at the state level are put together,” said one key respondent. “We’re putting together things that are not put well together at 390 [MDES Headquarters in St. Paul]. It’s hard for them to see out of their stovepipes — they don’t see clients.”

The commitment to shared leadership among workforce partners at the Center has facilitated the transition of the Anoka Center to a well-developed One-Stop that is well positioned to integrate future welfare-to-work and school-to-work initiatives. There has been a strong emphasis on maintaining regular and open lines of communication among Workforce Center partners and other providers of support services through forums such as advisory groups, a steering committee, and operations committees. There are now greater opportunities for staff input through the committee structure, and several Center employees indicated believe that their suggestions result in more useful services to their employer- and job-seeking customers.

Staff at the Anoka Center have challenged themselves to create a new structure for workforce development, while at the same time maintaining their focus on high-quality customer service under conditions of diminishing resources. According to one key staff person, “We’re serving more people, and at the same time we’ve stepped ahead of the wave. . . We created our own ideas on how to make the system work.”